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The facilitators of interagency working in the context of European public service reform

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of key lessons about the governance and leadership of interagency working in multi-level contexts. The article is based on interviews with local and national leaders across Europe. This topic is timely given the complexity of European public sector governance which demands leadership, co-production, and styles of collaboration which promote partnership-working within local contexts. We highlight that localism is central but this still requires national political leadership for localism to be managed and delivered effectively. In other words, empowerment-heavy models of governance, without top-down support, risks interagency ineffectiveness or even failure. We argue that leadership at macro, meso and micro levels of the governance system is required in order for successful interagency working to be delivered. We find that removing the barriers to interagency working requires the identification of an interagency leader (and to even enshrine this within statute), clear roles and lines of accountability for professionals, a breakdown of disciplinary silos, non-tokenistic bottom-up approaches, national public service leadership which promotes capacity building, and the dovetailing of planning and evaluation. The article concludes by proposing strategies for developing effective multi-level interagency working.

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Introduction

In Western Europe, the rise in studies of interagency working reflect the need for state actors to span boundaries and work across sectors in an effort to address the emergence of new social risks (Borosch, Kuhlmann, & Blum, 2016; Christensen, 2015; Connolly et al., 2020; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012). There is a huge diversity of challenges, new policy responses and rising significance of targeted social policy measures. Social services play a vital role in addressing the various risks which face different societal groups, such as long-term unemployment, obsolete skills, single parenthood, lack of family support, and

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health and educational inequalities (Borosch et al., 2016). The increased role of partnership working within policy systems is recognition of the fact that there are performance challenges with adopting a purely bottom-up or top-down approach to public administration (Knoepfel, 2011; Lipsky, 2010; Rodrigues & Araújo, 2016). Over three decades ago Paul Sabatier, who helped the public administration discipline move further towards network-based thinking with regards to policy formulation and implementation, called for a synthesis between top-down and bottom-up perspectives (Sabatier, 1986). In short, inter-agency working needs to respond to the complexities borne from new social risks, which are multi-faceted and rarely have one solution (Borosch et al., 2016; Mackenzie, Collins, Connolly, Doyle, & McCartney, 2017; McConnell, 2018). Interagency working involves agencies and stakeholders sharing resources in order to solve complex social problems with the intention of improving outcomes for the beneficiaries of services. This process often requires integrated leadership capacities across multiple levels of governance (see also Hodges, Nesman, & Hernandez, 1999; Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010; Warmington et al., 2004).

The trend in West European public sector reform has been a disaggregated approach to reform based on national authorities 'enabling' local and partnership agencies to take responsibility for service delivery. Stoker (2016, p. 9) reflected on the trend of European governance reform and noted that

it is extraordinary how much of the language and debate about public service reform is shared between European countries ... At a broad level what is clear is that working through and with other organisations to achieve service delivery ... is the norm.

In this respect, the effectiveness of interagency working comes into sharp focus. The literature is clear about the importance of national policy agendas in determining the cultures, practices, behaviours and implementation approaches to interagency working (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sørensen, 2012). Within empowered, localised or enabled systems of administrative governance a great deal also depends on the skills, traits and experiences of 'boundary spanning' public servants who operate in collaborative and inter-organisational settings (Klijn, van Meerkerk, & Edelenbos, 2020).

It is within this context that this article provides key learning from Western European research studies (involving the authors) which sought to understand 'what works' when it comes to interagency working. The article provides an overview of key learning based on the lived experiences of those who are 'interagency agents' or boundary spanners. In many senses the effectiveness of the interagency dimensions of public service reform is best determined by those who operate in such settings given that these actors can be described as 'catalytic' leaders (Luke, 1998) who are able, or at least attempt to, galvanise silos and span boundaries.

The article is structured as follows. First, in order to contextualise the lessons that we have drawn from the European research projects, we provide an overview of key developments in European public sector reform and locate interagency working within this discussion. Second, we draw out key findings from the interagency studies (essentially a meta-analysis of the studies). Third, we conclude by arguing that removing the barriers to interagency working requires the identification of an interagency leader (and to even enshrine this within statute), the need for clear roles and lines of accountability for professionals, a breakdown of disciplinary silos, non-tokenistic bottom-up or co-productive approaches,

national public service leadership which supports interagency capacity building, and the need to value evaluation, not just performance measurement.

Public services governance reform in Europe: a primer for contextualising the learning

Among the challenges faced when attempting comparative analysis of interagency working in multi-level contexts within a framework of European public services governance, are variations in the theory and practice of governance concepts resulting from differential approaches to modernisation agendas over time and across states. Under the broad umbrella of public administration, change agendas labelled, variously, as public management, new public management, governance, new public governance and public value, *inter alia*, have swept through systems of government and public service organisations in recent decades (for an overview of these historical trends, see Pyper, 2015).

It is important to address two common misapprehensions here. The first is that these waves of change were solely or primarily Anglo-American and Antipodean, and left Europe largely untouched. While it is true to say that the governing practices and constitutional traditions of the European Union and some European states led to a more lasting affinity with the concepts of 'traditional' public administration (as argued by Bevir & Rhodes, 2003, p. 83), there is extensive evidence to show that the successive variants of public management reform were adopted, in varying degrees, both by western European governments and later by the new accession states to the EU in central and eastern Europe. The work of Greve (2006), Hansen (2011), and Kickert (2011) revealed much about the adoption of new public management across Scandinavia, France, Germany, the Netherlands and a range of southern European states, and emphasised the importance of history, administrative cultures, and constitutional arrangements in shaping the particulars of the reform programmes in these states. Similarly, central and eastern European reform trajectories were contextualised by Hesse (1993) and Rose-Ackerman (2005).

The second misapprehension is that public management, new public management, governance, and their sub-paradigms have been applied in a uniform, ubiquitous fashion. In fact, over-generalisation is to be avoided, as the evidence shows that, across the globe, variation and contextualisation is the norm, with no single model of modernisation being universally adopted, and considerable differences apparent in the design and implementation of reform processes (as argued, for example, by Kickert, 1997; Pollitt, 2001, 2002, 2007, Pollitt & Bouckhart, 2004). Even in the states which were early adopters of new public management and its successors, like, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, there were nuances and fine-tunings which drove the specifics of the public service reform agendas (see Halligan, 2011; Massey, 2007, p. 20; Massey & Pyper, 2005, pp. 27–39), and these patterns were apparent across the globe (for analysis of experiences in Asia, see Turner, 2006 and Cheung, 2011).

One common theme can be stressed, nonetheless. The new paradigms and sub-paradigms located under the overarching concept of public administration each featured moves in the direction of disaggregated government, and the growing importance of governing through complex multi-level networks of public, private and not-for-profit organisations in which the successful creation and delivery of policy hinged upon effective

leadership and collaborative working. The opportunities presented by governing through these networks include the application of complementary skill-sets across the various organisational entities, the forging of bespoke and focused policy initiatives, devolution of power and authority, and the prioritisation of public value. The challenges are considerable, however, and include the need for appropriate mechanisms of accountability, and the requirement to strike the correct balance between delegated power and authority on the one hand, and strategic coordination on the other, which emphasises the importance of genuine collaboration and partnership working, as well as the crucial requirement for strategic political leadership. Recent work by McMullin (2020) stressed the importance of understanding how different models of public management define state/third sector relationships and affect both the operations of professionals and the processes of co-production.

Moreover, European social policy approaches have strongly promoted interagency or joined up working in efforts to generate efficiencies (Barnes et al., 2017; Burns & Köster, 2016). The need for public leadership across boundaries within systems at partnership-, or *meso*-, levels is to ensure that communication flows and early detection processes are in place to identify problems before they become acute and de-stabilise pre-existing governance arrangements (Connolly et al., 2020; Davidson, Bunting, & Webb, 2012). Responsibility for this is often placed on interagency leaders. Williams (2002, p. 103) maintained that such individuals are responsible for multilateral brokerage, coordination and integration who need to manage multiple accountability flows from below, above and across territorial boundaries. Leading in a co-productive style is often promoted as an 'intrinsic good' as a boundary spanning strategy (Needham & Carr, 2009; Slay & Stephens, 2013). Connolly et al.'s (2020) systematic review of co-production within health and social care contexts showed how terms such as co-production, and its conceptual sister 'co-creation', are often defined imprecisely within national policy narratives (and official documentation) which does not help those who are tasked with being productive and leading co-productively within interagency contents. From a governance standpoint, accusations of the vacuousness of the political narratives of co-production are not helped by the acute challenges of evaluating the value of co-production when it is used as a governance term used to nudge interagency actors to embrace an ideologically-driven empowerment or an enabling agenda. The darker side of such a situation is that it might not actually be in the interests of national actors to seek to evaluate interagency working or integration given that failures in high risk and politically salient social policy areas can be exposing and, moreover, disrupt the legitimacy of flagship policies underpinning political agendas. In addition, Williams et al. (2020) highlighted that for co-production to be realisable then there is the need to meaningfully rebalance power relationships towards service users, patients or marginalised citizens (and away from agents of the state). The danger is that the language of co-production is used as a symbolic mechanism for describing surface-level engagement and deliberation. This discussion sets the context and identifies the conceptual prisms for the rest of the article.

Methodological approach

This article summarises findings from two major European social policy studies of interagency working (10 countries in total). The first study is the interagency working

component of the *Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society* (ISOTIS) study (funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme). The article includes two substantive research elements: (a) a systematic literature review of interagency working with young children supported by interview-based case studies of successful examples in the following eight countries and sites (Belgium, Ghent; England, London; Greece, Athens; Italy, Reggio Emilia; the Netherlands, Utrecht; Norway, Oslo; Poland, Warsaw; Portugal, Braga) (Barnes et al., 2018); and (b) a multi-partner interview study of service coordinators ($n = 61$) (Guerra et al., 2019) in the following countries and sites: England (London and Wirral); Czech Republic (Brno and Ústí nad Labem); Italy (Milan and Turin); Germany (Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia); Greece (West Athens and West and East Attica Region); Netherlands (Utrecht and Rotterdam); Norway (Drammen and Oslo); Poland (Warsaw and Łódź); and Portugal (Lisbon and Porto). The second study, by Connolly et al. (2020), focused on interagency working in the context of public sector reform as part of an agenda to integrate health and social care services in Scotland. The research – *How co-production and co-creation is understood, implemented and sustained as part of improvement programme delivery within the health and social care context in Scotland* (funded by the Scottish Improvement Science Collaborating Centre) – was also made up of two elements: (a) a systematic review of co-production and co-creation in the context of the interagency and 'integration' of services; and (b) interviews ($n = 21$) with area-based interagency leaders across Scotland as well as national policy-makers from the following areas: Dundee; Dumfries and Galloway; East Ayrshire; Fife; North Ayrshire; Renfrewshire; South Ayrshire; and West Dunbartonshire. There is a strong degree of methodological consistency across the studies by Barnes et al. (2018), Guerra et al. (2019), and Connolly et al. (2020). The target samples of the studies were key stakeholders such as service providers, policy makers, heads of services and coordinators. Interviewees also played key 'multi-level' roles in terms of engaging with the political, strategic and/or operational levels and were involved in overseeing, budgets, and the performance of services.

The article draws out the key findings from these studies regarding what emerged as the most important enablers or facilitators of interagency working. Each of the studies contained in-depth analyses and details around specific contexts but the key learning points are drawn out on a 'meta-review' basis. As already noted, these findings are interpreted in the context of developments in European public sector reform i.e. a governance drive towards network-based approaches, a focus on localism, and a reduced emphasis on national capacity and leadership to enable reform processes.

Learning from 10 European contexts: the dominant facilitators of interagency working

Political support

The respective evidence reviews in the study point to political support as one of the most critical facilitators of changes to services. Capacity-building from the centre (national-level) coupled with financial support are crucial for the sustainability of services. Without sufficient central and/or local government support then innovative and creative developments within areas often fail, as has been found in the UK with respect of Sure Start children's centres (Smith, Sylva, Smith, Sammons, & Omonigho, 2018). The importance of top-

down governmental support for service integration was mentioned as a facilitator in the vast majority of area-based case studies across Europe (Barnes et al., 2018) and by key service providers and coordinators in all the countries studied (Guerra et al., 2019). This Greek politician summed up the issue well with reference to the global financial crisis and the exposure of the weaknesses in the Greek economy:

The social impacts of the [global financial] crisis cannot be addressed at the local level under the municipal responsibility; central policies are needed. (Cited in Guerra et al., 2019, p. 65)

This was a challenge for many countries given that European public sector reform developments place less emphasis on top-down support. However, there are examples of stronger degrees of top-down support and, the research suggests, this has proven to be beneficial to the quality and outcomes of interagency working. Examples of this can be seen in Children and Family centres in the municipality of Reggio Emilia in Italy and in municipalities in Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal. All of these contexts involved regional or national policies that promoted the work of the agencies and offered practical support to enable reform.

This contrasts with other countries, such as Scotland, where interagency working to progress the integration of health and social care services has been based on an empowerment-heavy approach whereby national political support is far from evident and local areas worked to a localised model of leadership and delivery without a nationally coordinated approach to public service reform, with political interference and ‘meddling’ being more evident than support. A senior official within a health and social partnership area in Scotland highlighted this point:

The Scottish Government announced that every health visitor in Scotland will suddenly become one grade higher, from a band six to a band seven. It’s going to cost me £400,000 a year extra by three years from now. So I’ll end up with ten fewer health visitors and then people start to complain we can’t get a health visitor, and you say, well, I can’t afford it, I can only spend the money I’ve got. If you want a proper relationship with what you say is the flagship organisational model for this government, health and social care partnerships, set the strategic context, give us the money, and then give us the freedom to go away and do the things that you reasonably ask us to do. (Interview, cited in Connolly et al., 2020, p. 48)

Similarly, when national policy support has been in evidence and then lessens its emphasis on inter-agency collaboration, close links between agencies may suffer:

We all miss ‘Every Child Matters’, massively. It was one really simple framework that all agencies understood and could relate to and gave us a common purpose, which is especially in times of austerity to help people to pull together and share resources. (England interview cited in Guerra et al., 2019, p. 138)

Nevertheless, while policies aimed at ensuring interagency working may have varying motivations, their support will enable agencies to work more closely together, and may also facilitate a secure funding base.

Localism/bottom-up approaches, but not hands-off

A focus on integrated interagency working is often accompanied by a shift in emphasis away from a *top-down* approach to supporting families towards a *bottom-up* approach,

to ensure meeting the needs of the local community, and providing more relevant and appropriate services (Katz & Valentine, 2009). All the European case studies (Barnes et al., 2018; Belgium, England, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland) identified local community (bottom-up) involvement and support as a feature leading to their greater success, a view reflected in interviews with service coordinators (Guerra et al., 2019).

Having ‘privileged informants’ in each locality, that is, a person who is from the community, who is usually empathetic and assertive with that same community, seems like a practice to encourage more active participation. (Portugal interview, cited in Guerra et al., 2019, p. 132)

This local support can be enhanced by involvement of other informal partners such as local community groups and NGOs, who could play an important role by participating and investing in activities. Service providers and coordinators across the studies emphasised the importance of taking a bottom-up approach that valued meaningful input from local communities and that co-production (although challenging to deliver and sustain given this requires a re-balancing of power relationships from providers to citizens) is regarded by interagency stakeholders as an important aspect of service reform. Although local partnerships can provide a mechanism for organisations to work together and adapt policies to respond effectively to local needs, the studies highlight that concerns over quality and accountability of interagency work emerge when services that usually come under public sector control are outsourced to other sectors, such as the voluntary or private sector. In this respect, public sector agents responsible for working across service boundaries require the skill-sets and government support to manage the performance of commissioned services and that the presence of these skills cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, a service planner for mental health services in Scotland noted in an interview that public managers ‘require the skills and understanding about how to apply involvement, engagement participation and co-production across the spectrum of how they set up their programmes of work’ (Interview, cited in Connolly et al., 2020, p. 59).

Receptivity of professionals to be interagency working

A further dimension to emerge from the European case studies and interviews was that professionals within the children’s services and health and social care services may have reasons to not fully subscribe to interagency working. Professional boundaries can exist relating to differences in status. Training and different explanatory models (e.g. social vs. medical) were mentioned as barriers in the majority of the European case studies. A mismatch in cultures, behaviours and understanding of services can create a divide between the disciplines, a lack of clarity of purpose for integration, and a failure to agree partnership outcomes. This needs to be addressed to facilitate smoother working together as this manager from England reported:

There needs a lot of work to make it happen in terms of taking down the barriers that sometimes professionals put up, and make sure we have full understanding of what each agency is about. (Cited in Guerra et al., 2019, p. 142)

These ‘silo-based’ cultures are also a product of organisational differences and with regards to different accountabilities and pay structures. For example, in Scotland, the

integration of health and social care services requires local authorities and health services to integrate but staff in these respective areas have been subject to different institutional cultures and performance regimes as outlined in an interview with a senior lead for the interagency working across health and social care services:

Actually the bigger issues for us has been around what makes integration difficult. It is about having two different employers ... I understand that it's been a common theme across the piece. ... We now need managers who are fully versed in the supervision requirements of both organisations, the grievance procedures, the absence management procedures. (Interview, cited in Connolly et al., 2020, p. 50)

Moreover, professionals – such as those in health services – traditionally have a role that is directive and informative (expert) while other non-medical professionals may be trained to be more collaborative in their interactions with the families. Professionals working in innovative interagency roles may also experience human resources issues such as short-term contracts, lack of career structure, and limited opportunities for promotion (see also Cameron, Macdonald, Turner, & Lloyd, 2007; Heenan & Birrell, 2006). Managers of multi-agency teams need to reach out beyond the team i.e. to leadership within the locality and to develop broader partnerships with community organisations. It is also important to provide staff development opportunities, including joint activities, to increase understanding of other disciplines.

Shared values and goals

The European case studies showed that, for agencies to work together successfully, there is a need to share a common purpose (Barnes et al., 2018). It has been reported in other research (see Atkinson, Jones, & Lamont, 2007; Einbinder, Robertson, Garcia, Vuckovic, & Patti, 2000; Hubbard & Themessl-Huber, 2005) that establishing effective partnerships depended on securing commitment and defining a common purpose at all levels of agency hierarchies as well as clarifying roles and responsibilities (e.g. ensuring parity, valuing diversity) to engender trust and mutual respect between agencies and foster understanding. Shared values and commitment to interagency working is one reason for success (Barnes et al., 2018; Connolly et al., 2020). For example, partners in Portugal's Choices Programme (Programa Escolhas) consortia were noted to 'share a strategic vision, pursue compatible targets, all equal members in a predetermined organisational structure'. In the Belgian case study, shared commitment was implicit in all activities to ensure that families who might not have the correct credentials to approach other services would be given support. Shared values were commonly linked with strong leadership within an organisation. For instance, commitment between partners in the integration of culturally and linguistically diverse (mainly Roma) children into education in Greece was attributed to the leadership provided by the local university. This service manager reflected on this need for a shared vision:

I give high priority to the will, not only of the staff but also of the elected and the administration as a whole, the support from top management and then to the common vision, to share the same goals. (Interview Greece, cited in Guerra et al., 2019, p. 68)

The need to respect the values of the service-user and being able to reflect this in the values undergoing reform in interagency contexts is especially important in areas serving diverse population groups.

Clarity over lines of accountability, communication and data sharing

There have been other studies which highlight the importance of clarity in lines of accountability and communication. For example, Atkinson et al. (2007) identified communication as important for maintaining effective multi-agency processes, as did an Australian review (NSW, 2010), especially in the context of building relationships including: agency to agency; worker to worker; and client to worker. This was consistent with the findings of the European case studies – the vast majority of which noted that regular meetings were important for success. They further noted that good and regular communication was facilitated by strong and effective leadership and governance. A representative from a national government body in Scotland highlights the problems if this *does not* happen:

You've got people kind of in their silos, dedicated to whatever the policy might be they're looking after, and you see the struggle in trying to make those connections, it's just amazing the kind of road blocks that happen along the way. (Interview, cited in Connolly et al., 2020, p. 62)

Statham (2011), who provided a comprehensive review of international evidence, similarly highlighted the importance of opportunities for joint/inter-professional training, secondments between services, which is likely to promote shared values. Co-location of services has been promoted as a way to facilitate interagency working and this was supported across the European case studies. It was reported by several of the European case studies that, in addition to meeting regularly in formal contexts for case management, other contact was informal. This allowed for greater collaboration than would be the case if all communication were by e-mail or the telephone. From a service design perspective, it is important that co-location is built into strategies for interagency working as this will also support the reduction in the coordination issues relating to cultural silos.

A related aspect is that sharing relevant information about service between agencies (reducing the number of times their 'story' needs to be told) it is important to have shared management systems with common IT systems and formal agreements on data sharing and an effective performance management system (e.g. joint review protocols and performance indicators). Reviews (Atkinson et al., 2007; NSW, 2010) have highlighted the need for clear procedures for information sharing, including databases. Legislation such as the UK Children Act (HM Government, 2004), noted that, in reforming children's services, there should be 'provision for indexes or databases containing basic information about children and young people to enable better sharing of information'. However, this has proved to be challenging to implement, with many agencies expressing concerns about compliance with data protection legislation. Thus it was not surprising that the regular sharing of information with effective IT systems was noted as a facilitator by only three of the ISOTIS case studies, while it was more often noted as a barrier. For example, in the UK only some of the agencies involved (e.g. education, family support) could share information but data from midwifery, while originating from a co-located service, could not be shared at all. This had been overcome in the Norwegian example; a common consent form was used so that families agreed their information could be shared between all professionals operating within the centre.

Sustainable funding models

The importance of sustainable funding models was identified as important to ensure effective interagency working. Sustained funding (e.g. through pooled budgets, written agreements around funding), ensuring continuity of staffing (e.g. by ensuring staff capacity and support for staff) and an adequate time allocation (e.g. realistic timescales, built-in time for planning) all emerge as crucial elements for interagency working. The European case studies almost all noted that insecure funding was a barrier in the long-term. For example, in Italy, to support the infant and toddler centres and preschools, the municipality of Reggio Emilia directly invests resources from its own budget in educational and social policies, benefits from public funds according to the national laws, and integrates further resources by receiving EU funds thanks to specific projects. A Norwegian centre manager highlighted this issue:

The main challenge is that services like this aren't legally mandated, so now, for example, when we are working at the budget for [major city] for the upcoming year, then you are never completely certain that these services will be allowed to continue, because there is no law regulating this. (Interview cited in Barnes et al., 2018, p. 133)

In other cases it was noted that, while funding was not secure, by pooling budgets the interagency work was facilitated.

The nature of the services being delivered and the population groups being served is also important. For health and social care services in Scotland, for example, the integration of health and social care does not currently have a sustainable funding model due to the challenges of public finances (also linked to austerity measures) coupled with the ageing population, which also presents an ongoing challenge for the delivery of social care services. In addition, evidence from Scotland indicates that interagency leaders within health and social care areas have had to wrestle with the challenges of identifying funds to support national policy announcements (which they were not always aware about beforehand), including employment more health visitors. An interviewee for the Scottish study argued that change is required in order for health and social care integration to have any chance of long-term success:

All the co-production and co-creation and collaboration in the world won't change that unless we have a different collaborative, co-produced dynamic with the public where we all take on a lot more responsibility. It feels to me that we are in an era just now where we don't need more leaders, but we need more leadership. And that must come from collaboration, from joint working, from partnership working, and you co-produce something at the end of it. (Interview cited in Connolly et al., 2020, pp. 50–51)

This relates to an earlier theme earlier in this article with regards to the need for national political support and the dangers of empowerment-heavy approaches to public service reform (i.e. that communications are not always clear and the risks of expectations regarding funding and capacity being in conflict across the system).

Embedding evaluative cultures and practices

The importance of embedding evaluative cultures and practices were seen to be important for the development and maintenance of interagency working across the vast

majority of interviewees for the case study areas. Respondents further noted that lack of an embedded culture of evaluation was likely to be one of the reasons why there is an absence of evidence about the impact of interagency working in social policy. This is also a key finding in evidence reviews (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). Atkinson and colleagues (2007) highlighted the relevance of performance management systems which embed evaluation, not just performance monitoring, for instance through joint review, the development of evaluation protocols and the co-production of performance indicators which are likely to enable information sharing and learning across services. Interviewees in Europe noted the absence of evaluation strategies to support more inter-agency working, summarised by this German manager: 'There is no quality management that examines whether networking is effective' (Guerra et al., 2019, p. 56).

The importance of developing the skills of interagency leaders and managers is key given that such professionals do not always have evaluation backgrounds (including when it comes to undertaking qualitative research of the impact of service changes with citizens or other stakeholders). Policy cultures that focus heavily on performance monitoring at the expense of evaluation are likely to provide a barrier for understanding the effectiveness of interagency working and the contribution of different partners to societal outcomes (see also Connolly, 2016). Embedding evaluative cultures requires national agencies to promote and provide practical ongoing support to enable services to access expertise and resources to understand the impact of their programmes and initiatives. This also necessitates a landscape that is not cluttered by agencies using different and possibly un-validated evaluation methods which can perpetuate ambiguities about the value of evaluation:

I think if we had a less cluttered landscape nationally then we could actually draw down on very specific high quality evaluation which I don't think currently exists. I'm not objecting. I think the tools are really helpful and they're really useful. I think there's a range of tools. I'm a big fan of, of using all the tools that we have, having a look at them. What I have struggled with is the quality of what is offered. (Connolly et al., 2020, p. 51)

Again, this interviewee points to the links with national public service leadership in that interagency leaders are likely to require national support to incorporate evaluation into their routine practices.

Conclusions

This article has highlighted the core conclusions of two major studies (deploying common methodological approaches) of interagency working in key social policy spheres across 10 European countries. Seven dominant facilitators of interagency working were identified within the context of disaggregated approaches to public services governance as part of modernised public administration processes. Western European policy systems reflect localism and empowerment agendas to governance reform, with interagency working being a key element of governance strategies. The lessons we have identified have, in many senses, been informed by 'what works' (and *vice versa*) within boundary spanning social policy areas (including education, health and social care). A key theme that can be drawn from the article is that localism is appropriate and highly desirable in modern

governance but this still requires national political leadership for localism to be managed and delivered effectively. In other words, empowerment-heavy models of governance, without top-down support, risks interagency ineffectiveness or even failure.

More broadly, there is a need for greater social science attention to be given to the role of the 'interagent' within policy systems. Research needs to move beyond conceiving interagency actors as simply important for galvanising multiple services and agendas in an effort to produce public value. We need to go further in the social sciences to investigate *why* they are important and, moreover, in what circumstances interagency leaders make significant and meaningful contributions to policy outcomes (and, moreover, in what circumstances they might not). For example, how does the internal and external policy context shape the leadership strategies deployed by interagency leaders? How do interagency leaders negotiate accountability dynamics from both lower and higher levels of policy systems? How do these dynamics shape interagency relationships? Future comparative studies should engage with such questions whilst emphasising the significance of contextualisation and local variation, including making determinations regarding which contextual variations are most likely to affect interagency relationships.

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